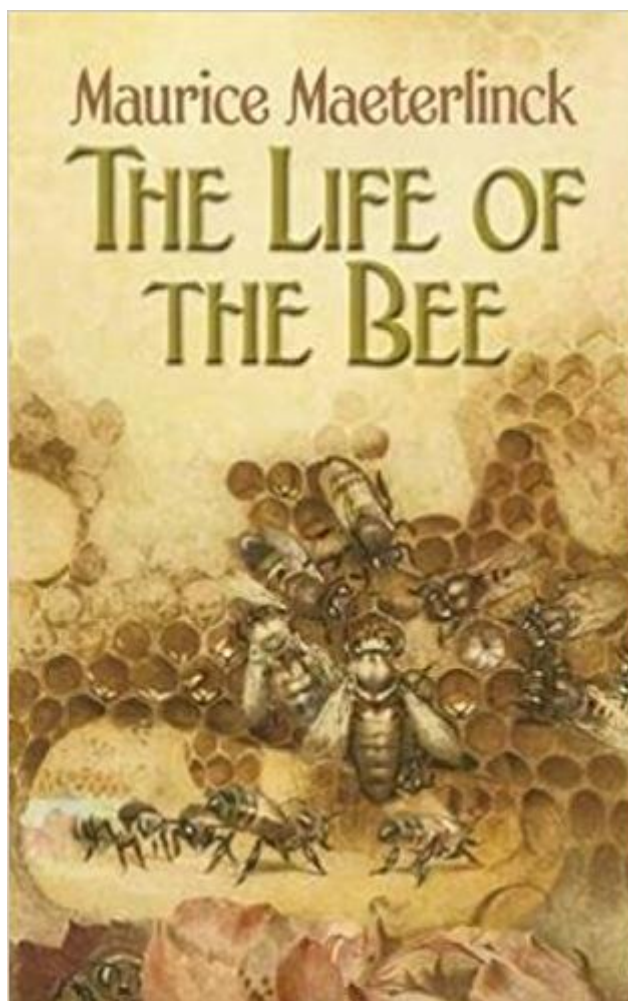


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The Life Of The Bee



Synopsis

In an exuberantly poetic work that is less about bees and more about life, Maurice Maeterlinck expresses his philosophy of the human condition. The renowned Belgian poet and dramatist offers brilliant proof in this, his most popular work, that "no living creature, not even man, has achieved in the center of his sphere, what the bee has achieved." From their amazingly intricate feats of architecture to their intrinsic sense of self-sacrifice, Maeterlinck takes a "bee's-eye view" of the most orderly society on Earth. An enthusiastic and expert beekeeper, Maeterlinck did not intend to write a scientific treatise, even though he details such topics as the mathematically accurate construction of the hive, the division of labor among community members, the life of the young queen and her miraculous nuptial flight, and the movement and meaning of the swarm. An enchanting classic by one of the most important figures of world literature in the twentieth century and winner of the 1911 Nobel Prize in Literature, this fascinating study is a magnificent tribute to one of the most orderly communities in the world. It is also filled with humble lessons for the human race.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Victor Erice's great film, "The Spirit of the Beehive" (1973), had as the inspiration for its title this work by Maeterlinck. Since the film has been a favorite since I saw it in a theatre when it opened on its limited American debut, only to fall into obscurity until 2006 when Criterion reissued it in a fine remastered box set, I felt I had to have this book. Erice writes, "The title [of my film] really is not mine. It is taken from a book, in my opinion the most beautiful thing ever written about the life of bees, written by the great poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. In that work, Maeterlinck uses

the expression 'The Spirit of the Beehive' to name the powerful, enigmatic and paradoxical force that the bees seem to obey, and that the reason of man has never come to understand."It must surely be the most beautiful evocation of the bees' lives ever written. I read it with the same pleasure as I do great poetry, even though my interest in bees is limited at best to my alarm that they're being decimated by our chemicals. Anyone can read this book and derive as much aesthetic pleasure from it as one gleans from its fascinating insights into these astonishing creatures. Your next dollop of honey will never be quite the same.

It is a classic, of course. He makes it quite clear that he is not an entymologist or an apiarist, but his own observations over many years are priceless. Particularly interesting are his explanations of swarming when the queen bee flies to higher altitudes than most bees can reach and is pursued by the male bees, one fortunate male is able to impregnate the queen while in flight--only to have his abdomen ripped out and dying when the deed is done. The sperm from that one donor is stored in a special organ in the queen's abdomen, where it is doled out to fertilize each of the thousands of eggs she will lay daily. It's a gruesome death for the successful donor, but that one male bee gets to father generations and literally hundreds of thousands of new bees. The fun part of Maeterlinck's descriptions is the endlessly delicate terminology he uses to describe the copulation process to a rigidly Puritanical Victorian readership in 19th century Europe. He has to resort to much word verbiage to explain the fact that--humans not excluded--in so far as Nature is concerned, the only reason for copulation is to continue the species.

An interesting book well written in the style of 1901 when it was published. The writer was very, very verbose and philosophical. I do wonder how people held conversations at that time. If people went on and on in the same way, though I have heard that political speeches lasted for hours as did sermons. Mr. Maeterlinck did love the bees and was obviously entranced by them. He offered very interesting information about what went on/goes on inside a bee hive if you can wade through and get to it. It is worth the read in spite of what I have said above.

Love his essays on subjects in everyday life and his plays

I was looking for a good overview of the honeybee. This book definitely has that, but the author often drifts off topic and seems to be equally, if not more, concerned about the study of mankind. It is almost as though the author is searching for God as well as for models of civilization. Always

interesting to read books written from a different time/period, and that need to be taken into account when selecting this book.

All the animals that nourish us (cows, lamb, goats, pigs, elephants, etc) we take care of them too. However the bees take care of us with their familiar honey which does not rot, its medicinal value and adding \$15 billion to our economy thru agriculture and feeding us and the rest of the world by pollination! Interesting and illuminating story about the bees

I loved this very insightful book that mixes beekeeping with philosophy and natural history. The only point I didn't like so much was the few poetic phrases that the author inserts every now and then. Other than that, very highly recommended.

I can't be ungrateful for a FREE book, but if you are as ignorant as I am, you will not realize that Maeterlinck (1862-1949) waxed (no pun intended) poetic on all sorts of subjects and the language is lovely but the information is very romantic and not exactly correct. This is somewhat like reading Rudolf Steiner on bees, which is very interesting but of no use whatsoever to a beginning beekeeper.

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